

September 4, 2004

## Arrowheads may spike plan to spray marsh reeds

By RICHARD DEGENER Staff Writer, (609) 463-6711, E-Mail CAPE MAY POINT - - Opponents of a plan to kill phragmites at South Cape May Meadows say American Indians may have once camped on land the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers plans to spray with glyphosate-based herbicides.

Dan O'Connor, the attorney for the opponents, said the presence of Native-American artifacts could put the project under the purview of Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

This often requires a study or inventory of the historic or cultural resources on the site. This could delay a controversial project that the Army Corps on Friday afternoon announced would begin Wednesday. Earlier this week, two monarch butterfly experts said the project could endanger the fall butterfly migration.

"This whole thing may hang on butterflies and Indian arrowheads," said Barbara Skinner, a Cape May resident leading the opposition.

Mayor Malcolm Fraser, who just returned from the Baltic where he was on a cruise with his wife, Joan, said it sounds like "just another scheme to destroy the project." Fraser said Indian artifacts are all over the Delaware Bay coast and can probably be found in the city of Cape May, but it never stopped a beach-replenishment project there.

Still, Fraser worries that the scheme could lead to the delay of a project he has been pushing for more than a decade. Spraying the phragmites with the herbicide Glypro is just the beginning of a much larger \$15.8 million project to restore beaches and the degraded ecosystem on the wetlands between Cape May and Cape May Point.

"If they hired a lawyer, he could get a fuzzy-headed judge to issue an injunction. It's a shame these zealots can create so much chaos," Fraser said.

As evidence of past Indian settlements, Skinner turned to Sea Grove Avenue farmer David Rutherford, who uncovered an Indian fire pit in the 1940s while plowing land that is now part of Cape May Point State Park, which is within the project area. Rutherford said he was preparing the earth to plant corn at the time.

Rutherford displayed several of the arrowheads he found and said there were also turtle shells, clam shells and bits of pottery in the fire pit. Rutherford farms on the edge of the meadows and often uncovers Indian artifacts. Rutherford said it makes sense that Indians would be in an area with two freshwater lakes, Lake Lily and Lighthouse Pond, and tidal creeks leading to the ocean.

"I would think the Indians could take great advantage of them," Rutherford said.

O'Connor said he also found a front page Cape May Star and Wave newspaper article from March 13, 1926, that documents the discovery of Indian artifacts in the meadows near Cape Island Creek at what was then the William J. Reeves farm. Hundreds of Indian relics, including arrowheads, tomahawks and mortars were found, the article said.

O'Connor's research places the Reeves farm within the project site, south of Sunset Boulevard on Nature Conservancy land.

"All of the surface collections suggest there was habitation there. The question is whether it will lead any official to want to intervene at this eleventh hour," O'Connor said. Fraser is hoping it won't. Fraser notes that the spraying is not disturbing the soil, just changing the vegetation.

O'Connor acknowledges the project would have to physically impact the Indian sites for it to be a factor. He argues that some of the land-based spraying - the project includes aerial and ground spraying - could do that as vehicles will be used. O'Connor also notes that, after the spraying, further plans call for digging ditches, excavating fish reservoirs, constructing a sand dune, installing tidal gates and pumping in sand. Much of this work could potentially disturb Indian sites.

O'Connor notes the Army Corps did do some cultural resource survey work along the ocean section of the project. He would like to see similar work done in the interior where the wetlands are.

"They showed some concern about historic resources," O'Connor said.

Fraser said the real concern is saving wetlands that are internationally significant for migrating birds and a big part of the local economy because they draw birdwatchers.

"I know they are doing all kinds of schemes to destroy the project, but what they don't realize is they're destroying the Cape May area by doing so, ecologically and economically. Phragmites are crowding out the food chain for the birds. It's just a matter of time before the birds go elsewhere, and that destroys the economics of Cape May. The zealots don't always think things through," Fraser said.

O'Connor said his clients don't want to stop the beach-replenishment part of the project, but using herbicides doesn't make sense for a project billed as restoring the environment.

"You don't destroy the environment to save it," O'Connor said.

The Army Corps spokesman for the project could not be reached for comment Friday, although the agency e-mailed a press release to the media saying that aerial spraying would begin next Wednesday at Cape May Point State Park and at the Nature Conservancy-owned Cape May Migratory Bird Refuge.

Both the state park and the Nature Conservancy support the project. The press release said the herbicide is one of the most widely used ones on the market and it is classified as non-carcinogenic to humans. The press release said many safety precautions are being taken, including a 100-foot no-spray buffer zone to public roads and private residences.

The buffer is 300 feet to public buildings.

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